

Message Text

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EXDIS - MILITARY ADDRESSEES HANDLE AS SPECAT EXCLUSIVE

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S E C R E T MANAMA 0649

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MORG, BA
SUBJECT: MIDDLE EAST FORCE DISCUSSIONS WITH FOREIGN MINISTER

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1. SUMMARY. REFTEL INSTRUCTIONS RECEIVED JUST MOMENTS PRIOR
TO MY PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED MEETING WITH FOREIGN MINISTER ON THIS
SUBJECT. FOREIGN MINISTER WELCOMED OUR ASSURANCES AND EX-
PRESSIONS OF APPRECIATION. HE THEN TOOK DISCUSSION WELL BEYOND
GENERAL POINT OF CONSIDERING BROAD GOB VIEWS, WHICH IN ANY CASE
HE HAD PREVIOUSLY GIVEN US, AND QUESTIONED ME ON DETAILS OF WHAT,
PRECISELY, USG WANTED IN WAY OF NEW FORMAT FOR NAVY. HE TOOK
DETAILED NOTES OF MY REPLIES, NOT HIS HABIT IN THE PAST, BUT

WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS DID NOT OTHERWISE RESPOND. FOREIGN MINISTER SAID HE UNDERSTOOD MY POINT THAT WHAT I PRESENTED WERE IDEAS, NOT USG POSITIONS, BUT ADDED THAT, FOR HIS PART, HE FELT IT WAS TIME TO MOVE TO "MORE OFFICIAL" LEVEL. HE SAID THIS WAS WISH OF AMIR AND PRIME MINISTER AND, THEREFORE, HE WOULD BRING MY IDEAS TO ATTENTION OF "SOME OF" HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES AND GIVE ME HIS AND THEIR REACTIONS NEXT WEEK. I SAID USG WOULD WELCOME DETAILED GOB VIEWS ON ANY AND ALL ASPECTS OF NAVY QUESTION. END SUMMARY.

2. FOREIGN MINISTER RECEIVED ME MARCH 19 FOR PREVIOUSLY SCHEDULED MEETING ON THIS SUBJECT. REFTEL INSTRUCTIONS ARRIVED JUST MOMENTS BEFORE MEETING BUT WERE VERY HELPFUL IN DISCUSSION SINCE THEY CONTAINED BASIC ASSURANCE WHICH FONMIN HAS BEEN SEEKING: THAT USG REMAINS INTERESTED IN NAVAL PRESENCE IN THIS REGION. INSTRUCTIONS ALSO USEFUL IN RESPONDING TO FONMIN'S SERIES OF DETAILED QUESTIONS.

FOREIGN MINISTER OPENED DISCUSSION BY NOTING THAT TIMING OF OUR MEETING -- JUST AFTER PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT RE HOMELAND FOR PALESTINIANS -- WAS PROPITIOUS SINCE OUR BILATERAL PROBLEM COULD NOT BE SEPARATED FROM EVENTS AND TRENDS ELSEWHERE IN AREA. I AGREED WITH HIS JUDGMENT THAT ISSUE OF NAVY IN BAHRAIN INCLUDED BUT WENT BEYOND BILATERAL ISSUE TO TOUCH UPON BROADER QUESTIONS OF AREA STABILITY AND US ROLE IN MIDDLE EAST DISPUTE AS WELL AS IN GULF AND INDIAN OCEAN REGIONS. (I LEFT WITH HIM COPIES OF TEXTS CONTAINED

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3. TURNING TO SUBJECT AT HAND, I TOLD FONMIN THAT ON BASIS OF INSTRUCTIONS GOB SHOULD KNOW THAT USG HAD REVIEWED AND CONFIRMED ITS POSITION THAT CONTINUING USN PRESENCE IN GULF/ INDIAN OCEAN AREA MAKES IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION TO AREA'S STABILITY. I EXPRESSED OUR DEEP APPRECIATION FOR BAHRAIN'S HOSPITALITY TO NAVY OVER MANY YEARS AND FOR CONTRIBUTION GOB THEREBY HAD MADE TO BROAD REGIONAL INTERESTS. I SAID THAT, AS HE KNEW, USG WOULD HAVE LIKED TO CONTINUE PRESENT ARRANGEMENTS SOMEWHAT LONGER. HOWEVER, WE UNDERSTOOD GOB DESIRE FOR NEW ARRANGEMENT WHICH WOULD PERMIT NAVY TO CONTINUE ITS AREA MISSION BUT WHICH, AT SAME TIME, WOULD RELIEVE BAHRAIN OF APPEARANCE OF BEING SOLE SOURCE OF SUPPORT FOR MIDEASTFOR IN REGION. I SAID I WOULD BE INTERESTED IN ANY VIEWS HE MIGHT HAVE DEVELOPED SINCE OUR LAST DISCUSSION.

4. FOREIGN MINISTER THANKED ME FOR ASSURANCES AND EXPRESSIONS OF APPRECIATION. HE SAID THAT, AS I KNEW, HE HAD HAD SOME DOUBTS ABOUT OUR NEW ADMINISTRATION'S INTEREST IN NAVAL PRESENCE IN THIS REGION, AS WELL AS ELSEWHERE, AND HE WAS PLEASED TO LEARN THAT GULF/INDIAN OCEAN WAS STILL OF CONCERN TO US. FONMIN SAID HE HAD NOT GONE MUCH FURTHER IN HIS THINKING ON FUTURE OF NAVY THAN HIS CONVICTION THAT DE-HOMEPORTING

WOULD BE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT OF ANY NEW FORMAT. HE SAID HE WISHED TO MOVE THINGS ALONG BUT TO DO SO HE WOULD NEED ANSWERS TO NUMBER OF QUESTIONS. NOT SURPRISINGLY, SERIES OF QUESTIONS HE THEN EMBARKED UPON REFLECTED LOW LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE WITHIN GOB ABOUT DETAILS OF MIDEASTFOR'S PRESENCE HERE.

5. FONMIN WANTED TO KNOW WHAT DE-HOMEPORTING WOULD MEAN IN PRACTICE. HOW MANY MILITARY PERSONNEL DID HOMEPORTING INVOLVE? HOW MANY WIVES AND CHILDREN? HOW MUCH TIME DOES FLAGSHIP SPEND IN BAHRAIN? I REPLIED THAT AT FULL STRENGTH MIDEASTFOR'S HOMEPART HERE MEANT THAT ABOUT 600 OFFICERS AND MEN, PLUS SOME 300 DEPENDENTS, CALLED BAHRAIN "HOME". THE FLAGSHIP NORMALLY

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HAS SPENT SIX TO SEVEN MONTHS EACH YEAR IN BAHRAIN, THOUGH OF COURSE NOT CONSECUTIVELY. FONMIN TOOK NOTES OF MY REPLIES AND THEN TURNED TO OTHER ELEMENT OF ANY NEW FORMAT WHICH HE HAS IN PAST IDENTIFIED AS ESSENTIAL: TERMINATION PRESENT STATIONING AGREEMENT. HE ASKED HOW, IN LIGHT OF THIS REQUIREMENT, WE COULD HANDLE ANY NEW ARRANGEMENT WE MIGHT REACH. I SAID I FELT THAT TERMINATION OF AGREEMENT WOULD GIVE US NO PROBLEM AND SUGGESTED TO HIM THAT PERSONNEL WHO WOULD REMAIN, OR WHO MIGHT VISIT, COULD BE ACCOUNTED FOR IN LEGAL SENSE BY AGREEMENT BETWEEN USG AND GOB THAT RELEVANT PARAGRAPHS OF AGREEMENT BE CONTINUED IN FORCE. I SAID THIS WAS POINT WHICH LAWYERS ON BOTH SIDES WOULD WANT TO ADDRESS BUT ONE WAY OF HANDLING IT MIGHT BE A SIMPLE EXCHANGE OF NOTES AGREEING THAT THIS OR THAT PARAGRAPH OF STATIONING AGREEMENT WOULD CONTINUE TO GOVERN IN RELEVANT CASES. FONMIN SAID THIS APPEALED TO HIM, THOUGH HE WOULD HAVE TO CHECK IT, SINCE IT WOULD MAKE NO POLITICAL SENSE TO REPLACE ONE STATIONING AGREEMENT WITH ANOTHER.

6. FONMIN SAID IT WAS HIS WISH, AS WELL AS THAT OF AMIR AND PRIME MINISTER, THAT NAVY QUESTION BE MOVED SOON TO SOLUTION

AND, THEREFORE, HE WOULD NEED TO KNOW WHAT, PRECISELY, USG WOULD WANT AFTER DE-HOMEPORTING. HOW MANY PEOPLE WOULD NAVY WANT TO KEEP HERE? WHAT USE WOULD NAVY WANT TO MAKE OF PORT? WOULD NAVY WANT TO KEEP ALL OF ITS SHORE FACILITIES AT JUFAIR? HOW WOULD SUPPORT OF BAHRAIN SCHOOL FIGURE IN THESE ARRANGEMENTS? I SAID I WOULD GIVE HIM MY BEST JUDGMENTS IN REPLY TO HIS QUESTIONS, BUT THAT HE SHOULD NOT TAKE MY REPLIES AS USG AGREEMENT TO ANY OF ELEMENTS I MIGHT MENTION. I TOLD HIM THAT SHORE FACILITY WHICH I FELT WE WOULD WISH TO RETAIN WOULD SUPPORT BAHRAIN SCHOOL, DEFENSE QUALITY ASSURANCE OFFICE WHICH MONITORS DOD CONTRACT WITH REFINERY, AND SERVE AS SUPPLY AND MAINTENANCE POINT FOR SHIPS WHEN THEY VISITED BAHRAIN. FACILITY PROBABLY WOULD NEED 75-100 PERSONNEL, INCLUDING CREW FOR AIRCRAFT. I SAID I FELT NAVY WOULD WANT THESE PEOPLE TO HAVE THEIR FAMILIES HERE. FONMIN INTERJECTED

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THAT HE FELT STRONGLY THAT GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN BAHRAINIS AND NAVY PERSONNEL WHO WOULD REMAIN WOULD REQUIRE THAT PERSONNEL HAVE FAMILIES WITH THEM.

7. CONTINUING, I SAID I FELT NAVY WOULD NOT WANT TO GO MUCH BELOW SIX TO SEVEN MONTHS ASSURED PORT ACCESS, THOUGH NAVY PROBABLY WOULD NOT NEED TO USE MORE THAN FOUR MONTHS SPREAD RATHER EVENLY THROUGH THE YEAR. CONCERNING JUFAIR COMPOUND, I SAID I BELIEVED NAVY WOULD WANT TO KEEP USE OF MOST OF IT, THOUGH CHANGES IN ITS NATURE AND IMAGE AS SHORE ELEMENT OF MIDEASTFOR COULD BE MADE IF MIDEASTFOR BECOMES AFLOAT COMMAND. I POINTED OUT THAT MUCH OF AREA OF COMPOUND IS DEVOTED TO RECREATIONAL AND EATING FACILITIES WHICH HAVE MADE POSSIBLE LOW PROFILE IMAGE WHICH GOB HAS WANTED NAVY TO MAINTAIN. I SUGGESTED THAT AT SOME FUTURE POINT FONMIN MIGHT WISH TO TOUR COMPOUND. HE DECLINED, AND NOTED THAT MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT BECAME NAVY'S LANDLORD AFTER BRITISH DEPARTURE. FONMIN THANKED ME AND SAID THAT IN ORDER MOVE ISSUE FORWARD IT WAS HIS INTENTION TO DISCUSS THESE IDEAS WITH "SOME OF" HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES AND TO GIVE ME HIS AND THEIR REACTIONS NEXT WEEK. I SAID USG WOULD OF COURSE WELCOME EARLY REPORT OF GOB VIEWS ON ANY AND ALL ASPECTS OF NAVY QUESTION.

8. COMMENT: FOREIGN MINISTER'S NEW-FOUND ENTHUSIASM FOR GETTING ON WITH IT APPARENTLY DUE TO PRESSURE FROM AMIR AND PRIME MINISTER SINCE IT IS NOT FONMIN'S HABIT TO INVOKE THEIR AUTHORITY AS HE DID DURING MEETING. FONMIN TOOK EXTENSIVE NOTES, WHICH HE HAS NOT DONE IN PAST IN MY PRESENCE, BUT WITH EXCEPTIONS NOTED HE DID NOT RESPOND TO MY REPLIES TO QUESTIONS. HIS RETICENCE IS UNUSUAL SINCE HE USUALLY HAS AND EXPRESSES AND OPINION ON ALMOST EVERY SUBJECT. FONMIN MADE NO REFERENCE TO WHAT WE MIGHT ARRANGE FOR NAVY ELSEWHERE. NOR DID HE MAKE ANY REFERENCE TO WHAT GOB MIGHT GET IN EXCHANGE FOR CONTINUING SOME FORM OF NAVY PRESENCE. THEREFORE, I CHOSE NOT RAISE ISSUE OF RENT DURING THIS MEETING. ALSO, I PREFER NOT TO RAISE QUESTION OF EXTENSION UNTIL WE KNOW WITH

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GREATER CERTAINTY THAT A NEW FORMAT IS POSSIBLE. IF IT DOES PROVE POSSIBLE, THEN I FEEL A DE FACTO EXTENSION IN TERMS OF AGREED SLIPPAGE IN ADJUSTING TO NEW FORMAT WILL BE POSSIBLE.

9. FONMIN'S RESPONSE TO MARCH 19 MEETING WILL BE BEST INDICATOR OF VIABILITY OF OUR APPROACH. AT THIS POINT MY FEELING IS THAT APPROACH WE WORKED OUT WHICH REFTEL CONFIRMED, OUGHT TO SUCCEED. AS DEPT AWARE, AMIR AND OTHERS DO NOT WANT TO SEVER COMPLETELY SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP WITH USG WHICH NAVY PRESENCE PROVIDES. IF WE MEET FONMIN'S NEEDS RE IMAGE OF BAHRAIN AS HOST TO "IMPERIALIST BASE", AND DE-HOMEPORTING OUGHT TO DO IT, THEN WORKABLE NEW FORMAT SHOULD BE ACHIEVABLE. ONLY

DARK SPOT I SEE AT MOMENT IS FONMIN'S FAILURE TO ASK WHAT WE MIGHT GIVE IN RETURN, AND WHAT OTHERS WILL DO FOR NAVY. I RECALL FROM MY YEARS IN DEPT THAT WHEN ISRAELIS WERE NOT ASKING US FOR SOMETHING THEY PROBABLY WERE NOT NEGOTIATING IN EARNEST, BUT WERE JUST TALKING.

10. DEPT. PLEASE PASS TO MILITARY ADDRESSEES INCLUDED ON REFTEL.

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